Think Before You Speak

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Think Before You Speak

by itsallAvengers

Summary

Tony talks to himself. Regularly. When you grow up alone for pretty much your whole life, live in a huge tower with no one but yourself and a disembodied voice for company and lock yourself up in your workshop for weeks on end, who else is there to talk to but yourself? What he thinks, he'll say. It helps him keep track of all the shit going on in his ever-moving train of thought.

It doesn't help, however, when five other superheroes make themselves welcome in your home- then it just becomes a big fucking problem.

So here's the problem.

Tony Stark was a man who knew how to work a crowd. He'd been born into wealth, into fame and spotlights and everyone begging for his attention or his statement or whatever it was he was famous for at the time. He could charm his way out of a paper bag whilst being wasted and partially naked (it was *one* time, okay?)

Put a Stark in a room full of reporters and paparazzi, and he'll walk out five minutes later with half of them under his thumb and the other half feeling thoroughly ridiculed.

However, once you got Tony out of the limelight…

Well, that's when things started to fall apart.

The thing was, well, Tony just wasn't used to friends. He wasn't used to people being there all the time- to constant company and people being in his penthouse at the ass-crack of dawn in order to pester him for more arrows, or ambushing him in his workshop and ordering him to eat on pain of death by blunt instrument.

He had lived alone for most of his life, and even when his family had been alive, it wasn't exactly as if they'd given half a damn about him. So, because of that lack of company and friendship…well, he'd gotten used to just talking to himself.

JARVIS was a constant companion, anyway. He wasn't insane, honestly. It was just mindless rambling. His brain worked so fast, it was hard to keep track of his train of thought unless he could hear the words that went with them. It as just a habit. No dastardly plans or threats to take over the world, or anything.

At least, not *that* many times.

But yes, Tony talked to himself. A lot.

And so of course, when you have had to be in your own company for the majority of your life and talk to yourself on a regular basis- and then suddenly fix hyperactive superheroes turn up at your door looking like kicked puppies and pretty much begging Tony to let them stay (maybe it was the other way around, but who's keeping score here, really?), things start to become slightly more difficult.

"Okay, soooo….plans for today, plans for tooodayyyy…oh *shit,* yes, I've gotta go fuck up those HYDRA weapons and make sure Fury doesn't get his dastardly bureaucratic hands on them and turn them into death-machines again. Because that's always fun, nothing like a spot of apocalyptic devastation to really wake you up in a morning. Honestly, with the amount of ridiculously out-of-their-league weapons SHIELD has taken on in the past few months, it's a fucking wonder we still have our-"

“Tony…who’re you talking to?” Came a wary voice from behind him, and Tony jumped about a mile in the air, spinning round from his position at the kitchen counter to splutter at Bruce, who was staring down at him with an amused grin and a cup of coffee wound tightly around his fingers.

“I- I just…have JARVIS in my earpiece, um, yeah- I’m making my plan for the day and he’s…sending it down to the workshop, so I can…look at it.” Tony said lamely, inwardly cursing himself for the pathetic attempt at an excuse.

It had been so much easier to lie effortlessly when these people had just been strangers to him.

“Ah, yes, of course. And, can I ask why you would happen to have an apparently completely invisible earpiece in at 8am in the morning?” Bruce pressed, his grin widening as he watched Tony narrow his eyes and stick his tongue out at him in annoyance.

“Fine, fine, whatever, you caught me talking to myself, well done to you, I’ll have you know that using this for blackmail is useless, I have literally no shame and-“

“Tony, you really think this is the first time I’ve seen you do this? I’ve heard you talking- and not just quiet mutterings, but full on conversations with yourself- on many an occasion. This is the first time I’ve felt like enough of an asshole to point it out, though. Sorry,” Bruce said, and he did almost look a little bashful, and Tony just thanked God it wasn’t Clint who had heard him- he wouldn’t ever let him live it down.

“Anyway, I’ve been listening to you for about five minutes now, just happily talking away to yourself, and you used your own name at least seven times, so the whole ‘yeah it’s JARVIS in my ear’ thing wouldn’t have worked anyway. But good effort.” Bruce added, patting him gently on the shoulder before moving on to refill his cup of coffee, and Tony reconsidered his previous statement about being glad it was only Bruce who had caught him.

That guy threw shade like fucking confetti, and the worst part was he was so damn quiet and sensible no-one would ever believe Tony if he tried to tell them about Bruce and his wicked ways.

“You know what, Banner, you might wanna tone down on that attitude, or-“

“What? You’ll fall out with me? I’m not sure Big Green would appreciate that, and you know what he does when he gets sulky.”

“Oh, God, I take it back. Please don’t hurt my tower, I love you and will do your bidding for however long you require, just don’t go rage in the middle of the lounge like last time, that was a nightmare.”

“That’s the spirit.” Bruce said, smiling scarily at Tony.

“Bruce, we’ve talked about threatening Tony with destroying his home in a fit of green-powered rage. ” Steve sighed wearily from behind them, and Tony turned around to smile brightly at his sleepy teammate.

He always loved seeing Steve in the mornings. With the usually-perfect hair all messy from sleep, and his eyes still half closed as he stumbled into rooms without looking where he was going. Most people assumed he was a morning person, and although it was true he didn’t need as much sleep as the average individual, it didn’t mean Steve enjoyed the process of waking up. In fact, unless there was something important going down, or he still had some pent-up energy residing inside, Steve tended to sleep in until the late morning.

“My sincerest apologies, Tony, I am incredibly sorry for my behavior and will try to improve it in the future,” Bruce deadpanned, and Steve just sighed again before flopping on to one of the stool and letting his head fall down into the crook of his elbow.

Tony looked at the spiked-up blond hair that was sticking up funnily on top of Steve’s head, and he quelled the urge to run his fingers through it.

“Nope. Bad Tony. Do not go there,” he told himself, turning around and grabbing some bread to fit into the toaster before realizing that he’d just told himself off out-loud.

“Fuck. Don’t look at me like that, Bruce. Go away, it’s too early for this.”

“And what is ‘this’, exactly?”

“I don’t know, life? Just let me drink my coffee in peace. I’m going to join Steve in napping on the table; please don’t bother me for a few days. I’m sleeping off my four nights of caffeine-fuelled geniusness.”

“Geniusness isn’t a word.” Steve piped up, his voice muffled by his arm. One of his arms dragged themselves up to hit Tony over the back of the head lightly, but Tony still squeaked indignantly, and used his free hand to dig Steve in the ribs, which elicited a delightful sound from Steve’s mouth as the sleepy man jerked his whole body away from the touch.

Bruce rolled his eyes and left the room, muttering things under his breath about ‘getting a room already’ and ‘enough unresolved sexual tension to make the fucking Hulk fall in love with Loki’- and Tony heard them, but he was too busy avoiding Steve’s half-hearted flicks at his forehead to say anything back, so he let it slide and instead focused on getting past Steve’s defenses and poking at a particularly ticklish spot that he knew of.

“Nat, why are you in my lab? Are you here to kill me?”

“You ask me that every time I show up somewhere unexpected.”

“It’s a valid question. I’m pretty sure you plot out all our deaths on a regular basis- I’ve seen the way your eyes flicker toward the breadknives when Thor’s being too loud.”

Natasha stared at him for a second, and then shrugged, conceding.

“You have a point. But if I did kill you, Steve would just start sulking, and no one wants to see that,” she said, walking forward and sitting herself with her back to Tony’s chair, her head resting on his legs as she twirled a knife around in her hand.

Tony glanced over toward Steve, who was sat on the far side of the room, head lolling on to the armrest as he napped. It was five in the morning, and as usual, rather than go to his actual bed, Steve had decided to spend the night in the workshop with Tony.

It was odd. Tony wasn’t used to people being in his space for such a long period of time. But what was even odder was that he actually enjoyed it.

And Tony must’ve been thinking out loud again, because Natasha looked up at him curiously, before nodding her head a little.

“I agree. Rogers is a weirdo. I mean, who’d want to spend more than five minutes of their time with *you*?” She asked, her face completely serious, and Tony just rolled his eyes whilst trying to fend off the embarrassment.

This was becoming a real fucking problem.

They were silent for a few minutes, Tony silently tapping away at his keyboard whilst Natasha rested on the floor beneath him with her head on his thigh and a blade spinning between her fingers. He spared her a look whilst she was distracted with cleaning a speck of dirt off her precious knife, and noted the dark circles under her eyes and the tiny intermittent twitch in her left hand.

She’d come here for the company, then. Nightmares were a bitch to everyone- even Natasha Romanov.

“You do that a lot.” She said suddenly, and Tony stopped his work to look at her questioningly, knowing there was more to her statement.

She waved her hands around for a second, trying to put it down into words, and Tony just waited, slightly amused. Sleep-deprived Natasha was certainly a new one.

No doubt he would be threatened with impalement if he were to talk to anyone about this in the future, but still, it was cute.

“You think things. And then you say them. And then you get this look on your face and your mouth goes all funny and you kinda twitch your right hand a little as if you want to clamp it around your mouth. Then a few seconds after you have that small micro-meltdown; you turn away to your left and then jerk yourself back again as if you were going to run away and then thought better of it. It would actually be quite funny if it wasn’t so sad.” She said, and Tony turned away to look at her again, thrown by her words.

“I don’t- it’s not *sad*. It’s just that my brain-to-mouth filter doesn’t exist and my inability to cope with emotions very much does. Therefore, anything that unintentionally falls from my traitorous mouth just kicks my fight or flight instinct into overdrive, hence, trying to run. It’s not…whatever you think it is.” Tony said, and Natasha laughed a little, tilting her head so it was at a ninety-degree angle and looking directly up at Tony.

“Anthony Stark, world class champion at long-distance running from his emotions.”

Tony laughed and lightly flicked Natasha between the eyes, rolling his neck and cracking the vertebrae, groaning a little in exhaustion.

“You’ve been alone for too long, Stark.”

“And you’re being too emotional for me to handle right now,”

“And you need to go to sleep,”

“And Steve should get some new gear. His old kit can barely stop a handgun bullet, never mind all the shit getting thrown at us when we go and Avenge everything.” Tony answered, his voice sharpening just a little as he stared at the screen where the rendering was just being finished on Steve’s new suit.

The memories of their last fight, where that stupid piece of shrapnel had just cut clean through the worn-down suit and stabbed Steve in the fucking stomach, flashed through Tony’s mind, and he bit down on a shudder.

That was his fault. He’d known Steve’s suit had been due for an upgrade, he had known that and he ignored it and Steve had been *impaled* because of it-

“Tony, whatever you’re thinking, stop it. You’ve been working yourself sick for the past few weeks, upgrading and inventing and answering to everyone’s whim; we’ve barely seen anything of you. Why do you think Steve is down here all the time? He misses you.” Natasha said, scowling a little, the knife tightening subconsciously in her grip.

“Hmph, I wish.” Tony said, and *Dear Fucking God*, he just could not keep his damn mouth *shut* today, could he, and now Natasha was looking at him all smug and knowing and Tony was trying to attack her with his pencil but she wielded her knife with a terrifying flourish and Tony yelped and fell backwards off his chair-

“What the *fuck* are you guys doing?” Steve called out from across the room, and Natasha’s eyes caught with Tony’s and they glinted mischievously as she opened her mouth to speak.

Then Tony tackled her to the floor and clamped a hand around her mouth, looking up at Steve with a smile as Natasha lay still underneath him, which Tony was incredibly grateful for, because it wasn’t as if she couldn’t escape from this with ease.

“Whatever Nat says is lies and slander and you need to never trust a word that comes out of her mouth ever again ever.” Tony told him, and Natasha gave him an extra two seconds before flipping them over and strangling Tony between her thighs in her signature move.

“What did you say again, Tony?” She asked sweet, as he coughed and spluttered on the floor.

“I- I said…you were stunningandbrilliantandpleasedon’tkillmebecauseIloveyou?” He rasped out, and he heard Steve move forward from the sofa before he felt arms prying Natasha’s legs off Tony’s neck and lift him off the ground huffily.

“Natasha, it’s rude to strangle people with your legs.”

“Whatever.”

“Tony, you need to stop antagonizing superheroes. One day you will do it to someone and they will actually end your life.”

“And I will descend into a hell as a legend.”

“Stark, you will tumble down into hell with a confused expression and then have an existential crisis over your misguided foundation of belief. I would hardly call that a ‘descent’.”

“Hey, for that, when you get down there too, I won’t let you share my VIP hellfire-home.”

“Aw, bless, you think that I’m gonna need all your freebie-shit. Honey, when I go down to hell, Lucifer himself is gonna be shaking my hand, there’s gonna be festivals and celebrations all over the hell-streets, and people will cry their fiery tears, and I will be queen-“

“You need to stop arguing about who will rule hell- it’s bad for morale,” Steve said, looking at them both wearily, his arms still wrapped around Tony’s waist as he regained his breath- and then at Natasha, who was still lying on the floor and looking as if she hadn’t a hair out of place.

He smiled a little; grudgingly releasing Tony from his hold once the man had regained his balance and was no longer on the edge of death. He was probably overstepping boundaries as it was; Tony had stopped needing him to hold him up at least five seconds ago, and Steve was now clinging to him just for the sake of it.

He really needed to cut that out. Tony didn’t want him in that way.
It was stupid.

“Your face is bad for morale,” Tony replied grumpily. Natasha laughed, stood up and high fived him.

Steve just sighed again.

“You wake me up at five in the morning with sounds of Tony being strangled, and then once you’re done trying to murder him, you both team up to be mean to me together. I just want to go to sleep, I’m not your fucking babysitter, I don’t deserve this,” Steve grumbled, turning away and falling back on to the couch face-first, letting out a sleepy groan as Tony promptly jumped on his back and curled up like a cat on top of Steve.

“I hate you.” Steve said into the pillow.

Tony patted his head in reply, his movements shaky from lack of sleep.

Natasha watched them from the desk as they both seemed to fall straight to sleep; Tony still curled up on his back and Steve’s face still smushed into a pillow. Tony’s hand was still resting on the top of blond bedhead, fingers half-buried underneath the strands.

She rolled her eyes.

“You’re both blind fucking morons, you know that right?” she said to the silent room, and Tony was just awake enough to flip her off, before his hand fell back to the sofa and he let out a tiny snore.

Natasha left. This time, she didn’t even remember to take her knife with her.

It all came to a head at dinner a week later.

Everyone was sat at the table, eating the Sunday dinner Steve and Clint had prepared together, as they did every week. For the past two Sundays, they had all been called out to fight extra-terrestrial crime, so the whole team was thoroughly looking forward to Steve and Clint’s exceptional cooking skills.

They were all laughing and eating and Tony was flitting between working on the formulas for his latest engine-design in his head and staring fondly at all his friends as Bruce and Thor used fork-catapult to fire pea-missiles across the room toward Clint and Natasha, who were too busy bickering over who had rights to the last slice of pie in the fridge to notice the vegetables that were wildly missing their intended targets.

“Sir, if I may inform you that Fury has warned me to let you know that if you do not come down to meet him in under two and a half minutes, then he is- and I quote, ‘going to fucking come to you, but I’ll have a big-ass grenade launcher and you will have nothing but your motherfucking crazy goatee to defend you.’” JARVIS called out quietly, but Tony just waved him off disinterestedly. He didn’t have time for SHIELD shenanigans right now- this was family time.

He glanced over to Steve, who was sat across the table from him, and Tony noticed that he appeared to be doing the same thing- eyes flickering over their friends, their family, watching with a kind of confused smile playing on his lips as if he couldn’t understand quite how he’d ended up here.

Tony could relate to that.

Their eyes met, and Steve grinned at him, shaking his head a little as he pulled a stray pea from Natasha's hair.

"My friends, I can almost say that this meal is as good as those of Asgard- of course, nowhere near all the grandeur and brilliance a true Asgardian feast would possess, but nonetheless, your food would land a solid second place. Consider it an honor." Thor boomed, his cheeks rosy from the mead he had managed to sneak past Steve somehow, and his words jumbling together ever so slightly as he sat back and beamed at his friends.

"God, you guys, in another world where Jane didn't exist, I'm pretty sure that was as good as a marriage proposal." Bruce said.

"Listen, I'm not blowing my own trumpet or anything, but my cooking skills are so fucking divine, I'm probably going to end up marrying myself." Clint said, and then he threw a sly look toward Steve, winking theatrically.

"Or, if I had to settle for second best, then cook number two over here's always free for me,"

Tony was only half-listening, the majority of his concentration being focused toward the napkin where he was scrawling down a few messy notes- but he certainly picked up on *that*.

Steve rolled his eyes, a tiny patch of red lighting up on both of his cheeks, and Tony couldn't help the tiny frown that appeared on his forehead when Clint blew him a kiss across the room.

Because, okay A) second-best my ass, Barton. I've watched you cook without Steve there to help you, it's a 7 out of 10 at best, And B) I already called dibs on him. In my head. But it still counts.

And Tony was so, *so f*ucking sure he had only said it in his head. He was like, at least 70% certain.
Maybe 56%. If he really pushed it down.

Okay probably more like 23%. But whatever.

The thing was, Tony's mind had been elsewhere. On engine designs and complex physics and possibly stumbling completely off-topic and poking around at some little algorithms that he was thinking about installing in JARVIS when he had the time.

So many things were happening in his brain, he had kinda forgotten the whole 'don't just say whatever comes to your fucking head, you live with people now and you have to not act like a fucking madman' thing.

And now the whole room had gone silent, everyone looking at him in a mixture of shock and surprise.

Oh, no.

Tony's eyes widened a little, and for a brief second, he caught Steve's eye again.

The man was staring at him, his mouth parted in a little 'o' shape that would be really cute if Tony wasn't *freaking the fuck out right now*, because how could he have let this happen, he had told himself that he wouldn't wreck this; he wouldn't let his stupid reputation get the better of him, he had told himself he was going to be careful and he wasn't going to screw this up like he did with so many other relationships in his life, I mean just look at him and Pepper-

"Tony, what did yo-"

"I am, surprisingly, very much not hungry. I… need to go do engines. Yes. Right now. Goodbye." Tony spoke over whichever person had been talking first, lurching out of his seat and stumbling away, hiding his face and running for his workshop like his life depended on it, ignoring the calls he left behind.

Unfortunately, supersoldiers tended to be faster than him, and despite his best efforts, Steve caught up with him at the elevator, practically throwing himself into it before they shut behind him and trapped them both inside. There was even a small dent from where Steve's shoulder had collided with the far wall.

Great.

"Tony, listen- about what you said. I…" Steve started, pushing a hand through his hair and huffing nervously.

Tony just looked at the floor and said nothing, unable to trust himself in case he blurted out something equally as ridiculous as the shit that had ended up coming out of his mouth a few minutes ago.

"Did you mean it?" Steve asked.

There were so any things he could've said. So many options that might have made the whole situation less fucked up than what it already was.

No, I'm sorry, my brain kind of comes up with the randomest shit when I'm focused on something else and you were just the unfortunate reciprocate of it.

No, of course I didn't mean it, buddy! You're my best friend, yeah, but don't worry, I'm not into you like that. Just a joke, you know?

Nah, who'd wanna date an ass like you?

“Yeah. Sorry. Don’t hit me.” Tony decided on instead, wincing a little as he looked up nervously toward Steve and noting the visible bewilderment on his face.

So, so not good.

Steve stepped forward and Tony flinched away automatically, preparing himself for the clock on the nose that was bound to be coming imminently.

What he really didn’t expect was a gentle hand tilting his bowed head upward, and another one coming to rest gently on his neck as a thumb stroked over the pulse under his ear.

“Do you even know… do you even understand quite how ridiculously gone for you I am? Steve asked quietly.

Tony cocked his head to the side and studied Steve’s facial expression, checking to see if there was any sign of a joke being played on him.

If there was, then Steve was a damn good actor.

“I…no? I’m not really much more than a smart guy who talks to himself way too much than what is to be considered normal.”

“Tony, I think we are all above the parameters of ‘normal’ at this point. I used to be a third shorter and live in the 40’s. Thor is a god. Life is weird, and anyway, I think it’s cute.” Steve admitted, and that blush was creeping back up his cheeks again, starting just under his ears and spreading all across his face, which was the most adorable thing Tony had ever seen in his whole life ever.

“You think…cute…*what*?”

“In the mornings, when you think you’re alone in the kitchen and you mutter stupid stuff about how Pepper is the devil in six inch heels and that if Clint has eaten all the fucking cheerios again you’ll turn his bow into firewood. It’s just- sweet.” Steve explained, and he bit his lip slightly as his eyes pulled over Tony’s face, looking for signs to see how Tony was taking the news.

‘Badly’ would probably be the best adverb to describe his reaction.

He was just kinda staring and staring and staring, and Steve froze for a moment- his thumb pausing it’s journey over Tony’s neck as he began to step out of his space, looking a mixture between horrified and mortifyingly embarrassed, muttering things sounding like ‘wrong impression’ and ‘jumped the gun’ and Tony just wasn’t having that, it was completely unacceptable behavior and frankly, just downright rude, so he retaliated by pretty much throwing himself into Steve’s arms with so much force they were both pushed into the back of the elevator wall, Steve exhaling in surprise as his hands snaked around Tony’s waist and pulled him closer, desperate for the contact as Tony’s hands brushed up into the perfectly-

styled blonde hair, teeth biting down sharply on Steve's bottom lip and reveling in the sound that was pulled from Steve's mouth as he did it.

"Is this real? I'm pretty sure I'm having a workshop-induced hallucination right now. Did I hit my head? I think I hit my head. This usually tends to happen once every few weeks, statistically speaking, it is more plausible that I am simply in one of my own dreams right now than in actual reality," Tony mumbled in between kisses, moving away from Steve's mouth and down toward his neck instead, kissing at the point just below his left ear.

Steve laughed, and Tony could actually sense the eye-rolling going on, but Steve chose that moment to flip them both around so that Tony was the one getting pushed up against the wall, which was definitely far too realistic and brilliant to ever be thought up by his own mind.

"No concussions. No head wounds. At least I think, unless you're hiding an injury from me and then I'm just gonna be pissed-" Steve rasped, hands working their way from Tony's neck downward, lower and lower until they were right on Tony's-

The elevator opened.

Fury Stared at them.

Tony and Steve stared back.

Fury stared some more.

Tony opened his mouth to say something.

Sensing that this may cause an international incident and possible double homicide, Steve quickly clamped his hand over Tony's mouth.

Fury stared at them a little more, before opening his mouth, and then closing it again a second later.

Steve tried at smiling. It did not work out.

“If I ever see you do this again, I will set you both on fire.” Fury finally said, before turning and walking back down the corridor he came from, coat tail swirling mysteriously behind him.

“Oh Good God.” Steve said after Fury had turned the corner, burying his head in Tony’s shoulder and groaning for flat out two minutes.

Tony stroked a hand through Steve’s now thoroughly un-perfect hair and patted him gently on the back with his other free hand.

“It’s only gonna get worse, babe.” Tony said, grinning.

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